

The 'Dial Hand' Epilogue: by Shakespeare, or Dekker?¹

BRIAN VICKERS

Abstract: During Shrovetide 1599 a play was performed before Queen Elizabeth at Richmond Palace, an occasion for which an epilogue 'To the Quene' was written to be spoken by an actor. Discovered in 1972, its first editors tentatively ascribed it to Shakespeare. Two scholars, Michael Hattaway and Helen Hackett, subsequently ascribed it to Dekker, but John Nance has recently revived the Shakespeare attribution, and the poem has been included in *The New Oxford Shakespeare*. This essay reviews the evidence, concluding that it was indeed written by Dekker. Jonson has also been proposed, having used the same verse form as the epilogue (trochaic tetrameter couplets), but a comparison shows that Jonson's are in strict trochaics, with each line clearly separated. Dekker's usage conforms to that of the epilogue, with more run-on lines and iambic metre interspersed. Hattaway had pointed out that the epilogue is also a prayer for the Queen's well-being, citing other examples ending plays composed during her reign. The key verb form for such prayers is the optative mode, in which the speaker's hopes and wishes are expressed by the word 'may'. A search of Dekker's plays and civic entertainments reveals that he frequently used such formulae, and in many cases echoes the exact wording of the 'Dial Hand' poem. Finally, the Shakespeare parallels cited by Nance are shown to be inappropriate.

Contributor Biography: Professor Sir Brian Vickers is a Distinguished Senior Fellow of the School of Advanced Study, London University, a Fellow of the British Academy, an Honorary Fellow of Downing College, Cambridge, and an International Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. His publications include *Shakespeare, Co-Author. A Historical Study of Five Collaborative Plays* (Oxford, 2002); *"Counterfeiting" Shakespeare. Evidence, Authorship, and John Ford's Funerall Elegye* (Cambridge, 2002); *Shakespeare, A Lover's Complaint, and John Davies of Hereford* (Cambridge, 2007); and *The Collected Works of John Ford, Vols. II and III* (Oxford, 2017), containing the six co-authored plays.

In the early modern theatre play performances were sometimes graced with prologues and epilogues. Since they were extraneous to the play proper, they would have been written on separate manuscript pages. Although most of these have been lost, some have survived.² Copies of prologues and epilogues formed part of the large-scale circulation of manuscripts in this period, which saw an increase in their collection and exchange. One

¹ I should like to thank Michael Hattaway and Helen Hackett for helpful comments on an earlier version of this essay.

² For a full listing of such materials see Thomas L. Berger and Sonia Massai (eds.) *Paratexts in English Printed Drama to 1642*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 2014).

such collector was Henry Stanford, chaplain and tutor in the household of Sir George Carey, Lord Hunsdon who became Lord Chamberlain in 1597.³ His commonplace book, now in Cambridge University Library, contains many poems by the courtier poets of the age, including this tribute to Queen Elizabeth:

To the Quene by the Players

As the diall hand tells ore
the same howers it had before
still beginning in the ending
circuler account still lending
So most mightie Quene we pray 5
like the diall day by day
you may lead the seasons on
making new when old are gon.
that the babe which now is yong
and hathe yet no use of tongue 10
many a shrovetide here may bow
to that empresse I doe now
that the children of these lordes
sitting at your counsell bourdes
may be grave and aeged seene 15
of her that was ther father Quene
once I wishe this wishe again
heaven subscribe it with amen.

The poem was first published by William Ringler and Steven May, who gave this summary: ‘the heading and the verses themselves indicate that the reciter wishes long life to Queen Elizabeth on an occasion when her Lords of the Council were present with her at a Shrovetide entertainment in 1598/9’.⁴ Payments were made for two Shrovetide plays in 1599, to the Admiral’s Men for a performance on Sunday 18 February, and to the Chamberlain’s Men on Tuesday 20 February. Ringler and May found it more likely that his own company delivered the compliment than ‘the rival company, the Admiral’s Men’, and suggested that the epilogue ‘may have been written by Shakespeare’. They noted that its grammar is consistent with Shakespeare’s usage, as seen in ‘such forms as the uninflected genitive in line 16, “father Quene” (that is, the Queen who reigned when their fathers were alive), and ‘the use of “which” as a personal pronoun in line 9’ (139). Both points are correct, but many other Elizabethans may have shared these preferences. They also observed that ‘the epilogue is composed in trochaics’ a rhythm used by Shakespeare ‘in more than twenty songs and poems in his plays’ (ibid.). Shakespeare certainly used trochaics frequently, but in this epilogue line 16 (‘of her that was her father Queene’) is in iambics, and line 2 seems to fluctuate between the two metres, as we shall see.

³ See Steven W. May (ed.) *Henry Stanford’s Anthology: An Edition of Cambridge University Library Manuscript Dd.5.75* (New York, 1988), pp. lxiii, 162 and May, ‘Sanford, Henry (c. 1552–1616)’, in *ODNB*.

⁴ See William A. Ringler and Steven W. May, ‘An Epilogue possibly by Shakespeare’, *Modern Philology*, 70 (1972): 138–9 (138). I reproduce their text, expanding corrections, and removing the virgule symbols (\\) they inserted to represent the manuscript’s reducing two lines to one.

The reception of Ringler and May's ascription was initially modest. The Riverside Edition tucked the poem away in an Appendix under the title of 'An Epilogue by Shakespeare?'.⁵ Juliet Dusinberre took its mention of the dial hand as referring to the sundial at Richmond Palace and to Touchstone's dial, thus dating *As You Like It* to 1599.⁶ Michael Hattaway rejected Dusinberre's interpretation and reminded scholars that the Admiral's Men, who performed on Shrove Sunday 1599, counted Jonson and Dekker among its regular dramatists.⁷ Hattaway considered the possibility of Jonson's authorship, but concluded that 'Dekker may be author of the dial poem' (164). Dekker's claims were further advanced by Helen Hackett, an authority on Queen Elizabeth, who noted the frequency 'of hyperbolic panegyric of Elizabeth' in his work and its absence in Shakespeare's, along with 'the sparseness of explicit references to the Queen of any kind in his writings'.⁸ John Nance has recently contested her judgment, claiming that 'all of the available evidence points to Shakespeare'.⁹ His attribution persuaded the editors of the *New Oxford Shakespeare* to admit it to their canon.¹⁰

In this essay I shall argue for Dekker's authorship. I identify two authorship markers in the epilogue: the verse form (trochaic tetrameter couplets), and the optative verb 'may', which is not distinctive in itself but gives an important clue to the poem's genre. To argue this second point I shall need to repeat some passages from the plays already cited by Hattaway and Hackett without realising their significance. I shall add new evidence from Dekker's 'shows', the pageants he contributed to official ceremonies, such as the annual Lord Mayor's show.

II Prosodic identities

To begin with the poetic form, Ringler and May's chief reason for ascribing it to Shakespeare was the fact that the poem 'is composed in trochaics', just like 'the trochaic epilogue spoken by Puck at the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This rhythm was a favourite with Shakespeare, who used it in more than twenty songs and poems in his plays, from the earliest to the latest' (139). In a subsequent publication, their wonderful first-line index of Elizabethan poetry, May and Ringler documented all the poems published between 1559 and 1603 written in this form.¹¹ Michael Hattaway noted that 'within [Dekker's] corpus, at least eight songs are written in trochaics' (164), and Helen Hackett added a relevant chronological fact that the trochaic songs in Dekker's plays were all written between 1598 and 1603 (37). But, as Hattaway pointed out, Shakespeare and Dekker were not the only dramatists writing trochaic tetrameter couplets in these years, for Jonson used them both in his plays and masques. Hattaway argued that 'the trochaic tetrameters used by Jonson ... in the songs from Lord Haddington's wedding masque,

⁵ See the 1974 edition, pp. 1851-2, the 1997 edition, p. 1978.

⁶ See *As You Like It*, ed. Dusinberre (London, 2006), pp. 36-42, 349-54.

⁷ See Hattaway, 'Dating *As You Like It*, Epilogues and Prayers, and the problems of "As the Dial Hand Tells O'er"', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 60 (2009): 154-67 (159). Hattaway repeated the gist of this note in his revised edition of *As You Like It* (Cambridge, 2009), Appendix 1: 'An early court performance?' (pp. 221-6).

⁸ Helen Hackett, "'As the Dial Hand tells Ore": the case for Dekker, not Shakespeare, as Author', *Review of English Studies*, 63 (2011): 34-57 (37).

⁹ John V. Nance, 'From Shakespeare "To y^e Q.", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 67 (2016): 204-31 (231).

¹⁰ See Gary Taylor et al. (eds.), *The New Oxford Shakespeare, The Complete Works, Modern Critical Edition* (Oxford, 2016), pp. 1507-10; *Ibid*, *Critical Reference Edition*, 2 Vols. (Oxford, 2017), 1:614-17; *Ibid*, *Authorship Companion* (Oxford, 2017), pp. 524-5.

¹¹ See Steven W. May and William A. Ringler, Jr., *Elizabethan Poetry. A bibliography and First-line Index of English Verse, 1559-1603*, 3 vols. (London and New York, 2004), 3:2121 ('aa4troch'), listing 116 poems. See my review, *TLS*, 10 February 2006, p.7.

performed at court on Shrove Tuesday in 1608,¹² and the satyr songs in his 1611 *Masque of Oberon*¹³ are very close in style to the dial poem and have roughly the same proportion of feminine endings' (159-60). The crucial stylistic factor in these poems, however, is not the feminine endings but the enjambement. The manuscript of the Dial Hand poem has no punctuation,¹⁴ and when Ringler and May published a diplomatic edition they inserted only two full stops, after 'gon' (line 8) and after the final 'amen' (18). The syntactical structure of the poem is straightforward, an 'As' (1) 'So' (5) analogy governing the first eight lines, followed by two four-line units introduced by the conjunction 'that' (9, 13), used to express a wish, and concluding with a couplet repeating the actors' good wishes for the Queen's health and longevity. The thought moves sequentially with only one sub-clause (lines 2-3) and a sequence of run-on lines, with little rhythmic emphasis on the first and last syllables of each line. Contrast that smooth, unemphatic movement with these verses from Jonson's *Haddington Masque*:

FIRST GRACE Beauties, have ye seen this toy
 Callèd Love, a little boy,
 Almost naked, wanton, blind,
 Cruel now, and then as kind?
 If he be amongst ye, say;
 He is Venus' runaway.
SECOND GRACE She that will but now discover
 Where the wingèd wag doth hover,
 Shall tonight receive a kiss,
 How or where herself would wish;
 But, who brings him to his mother,
 Shall have that kiss and another.
THIRD GRACE He hath of marks about him plenty;
 You shall know him among twenty.
 All his body is a fire,
 And his breath a flame entire,
 That being shot like lightning in,
 Wounds the heart, but not the skin.
FIRST GRACE At his sight the sun hath turned;
 Neptune in the waters burned;
 Hell hath felt a greater heat;
 Jove himself forsook his seat.
 From the centre to the sky
 Are his trophies rearèd high.¹⁵

Jonson took great care to correct proofs of his work, and the punctuation is undoubtedly his own. Although there are three instances of enjambement, he fully exploits the structure of trochaic metre, with its emphases on the first, third, fifth and seventh syllables. The strong stress on the final syllable tends to make each line self-contained, an effect strengthened by the couplet rhyme, for which Jonson chose words having a full

¹² See David Lindley (ed.), *The Haddington Masque* (1608), in David Bevington, Martin Butler and Ian Donaldson (eds.), *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, 7 vols. (Cambridge, 2012), 3: 261-5.

¹³ See David Lindley (ed.), *Oberon, the Fairy Prince* (1611), *ibid.*, 3: 726-38.

¹⁴ See the texts cited in note 1. Hathaway 158 cites the manuscript text, and Hackett 35 gives a facsimile.

¹⁵ *Haddington Masque*, ll. 63-86; ed. cit., 3: 261-2.

vowel: 'toy' / 'boy', 'blind' / 'kind', 'say' / 'runaway' in the first speech. The subsequent stanzas include disyllabic rhymes, which give the rhyme words still more emphasis, as 'discover' / 'hover', 'mother' / 'another', 'plenty' / 'twenty', 'fire' / 'entire'. The rhyme 'turned' / 'burned' is not disyllabic, but it uses a longer vowel and takes longer to read. Apart from references to the classical deities,¹⁶ Jonson's language is simple, but the overall effect is of a disciplined formality. Where the Dial Hand's trochaics have an easy flow, not energising the structural possibilities of the four-beat line, Jonson insists on them. These stanzas cannot be read quickly: actor and audience are forced to pause and digest each couplet. The imperious, sculptured, self-contained couplets continue through the Graces' speeches into the emergence of Cupid (87–142).

As for the *Masque of Oberon, The Fairy Prince. A Masque of Prince Henry's*, which marked Henry's first appearance as a principal dancer in a masque,¹⁷ he is celebrated with full trochaic insistence, emphasised with four identical rhymes in each verse:

Satyrs, he doth fill with grace
 Every season, every place;
 Beauty dwells but in his face:
 He's the height of all our race.
 Our Pan's father, god of tongue,
 Bacchus, though he still be young,
 Phoebus, when he crownèd sung,
 Nor Mars, when first his armour rung,
 Might with him be named that day.
 He is lovelier than in May
 Is the spring, and there can stay
 As little as he can decay.

A later sequence, in which the Satyrs discuss some violent means of waking the guards supposed to be protecting Oberon,¹⁸ is more animated, forcing the formal trochaic measure into the asymmetrical movement that Jonson often favoured in both poetry and prose.¹⁹ But both the measured and the nervous versions of Jonson's trochaics are quite unlike those of the Dial Hand poem.

Dekker's essays in trochaic tetrameters are fewer than Jonson's, and less polished. Given Dekker's status as a busy popular dramatist, with none of Jonson's self-conscious art and prestige as a poet, masque-writer and literary arbiter, we are not surprised that he did not emulate his colleague's discipline. The most sustained of Dekker's trochaic poems is this familiar lullaby from *Patient Grissil* (1600):²⁰

¹⁶ The editor notes that this passage (63–122) 'is expanded from Moschus's 29-line *Idyll*, "The Runaway Love"' (3: 261).

¹⁷ Ed. cit., 3: 713.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3: 727.

¹⁹ See, e.g., Jonas Barish, *Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy* (Cambridge, MA, 1960).

²⁰ All quotations are from Fredson Bowers (ed.) *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, 1953–61), here 1: 265.

Golden slumbers kisse your eyes,
 Smiles awake you when you rise:
 Sleepe pretty wantons doe not cry,
 And I will sing a lullabie,
 Rocke them rocke them lullabie.

Care is heauy therefore sleepe you,
 You are care and care must keep you:
 Sleepe pretty wantons doe not cry,
 And I will sing a lullabie,
 Rocke them rocke them lullabie.

That is a wonderfully consoling song, sense and movement perfectly co-ordinated, but it lacks Jonson's formal control, for line 4 in each stanza is an iambic, and line 3 hesitates between the two metres. If we read it as trochaic, with a strong emphasis on 'Sleep', the adjacent disyllabic words, 'pretty wantons,' require equal stress, throwing the line off balance. It seems more natural to read it as a four-beat iambic line:

Sleepe **pretty wantons doe not cry**

Gary Taylor has noted a similar phenomenon in line 2 of the Dial Hand poem (in his old-spelling text) 'ye same howers yt had before', commenting at some length:

The rhythm of the second line is exceptionally irregular. The last four syllables have a clear iambic rhythm, but the first half of this line is unlike any other in the poem. Assuming that "howers" is a monosyllable, the line does have seven syllables (like at least fourteen of the other lines), but the initial ye cannot be stressed, especially before "same". The manuscript requires reversed stress in the in the initial foot. Likewise, the third word has to be stressed more than the impersonal pronoun "it" ... If we assume, alternatively, that "howers" is pronounced as two syllables, we would have an eight-syllable line (like line 16, "Of her that was their father queen").²¹

Other readers of the Dial Hand poem would have no difficulty placing a stress on 'the', which the voice can emphasise more lightly than the opening syllables of the adjacent lines, 'As', 'still', 'so'. The line then shifts from trochaic to iambic, which probably represents a momentary hesitation in the poet's prosodic faculty, adjusting his intended utterance to the established metre. The monosyllabic word 'howers' is, so to speak, the hinge between the two metres. Trochaic is re-established in the next line ('still beginning') and continues undisturbed until the completely iambic line 16, before being re-asserted for the final couplet. The fact is that, although Ringler and May classify other Dekker lyrics in *Old Fortunatus* as wholly trochaic, all four begin as trochees but intermingle iambs. In the opening scene Fortune is dominant.

²¹ *Critical Reference Edition*, 1:617. Never loath to alter an author's text to overcome what he takes to be a linguistic difficulty, Taylor emends 'same' to 'self-same', presuming, as he puts it, 'an easy eye-skip (from one initial "s" to the next), made even easier by the fact that "same" and "self-same" are synonymous'. The epithets 'easy' and 'easier' are rhetorical gestures designed to neutralise the reader's suspicion of editorial tampering.

Fortune smiles, cry holyday,
 Dimples on her cheeks doe dwell,
 Fortune frownes, cry wellada,
 Her loue is heauen, her hate is hell:
 Since heauen and hell obey her power,
 Tremble when her eyes doe lowre,
 Since heauen and hell her power obey,
 When shee smiles, crie holy day. (1:118)

In lines 4, 5 and 7 Dekker shifts the metre to iambic so that he can accommodate the antithesis between 'heaven' and 'hell' in each line. The three other lyrics in *Old Fortunatus* mingle iambic and trochaic, as do many Elizabethan poems.²²

This brief comparison has excluded Jonson as the possible author of the Dial Hand epilogue but leaves Dekker as a candidate. Indeed, the fact that he fluctuated between trochaic and iambic in other poems written in the years 1598-99 strengthens his claim.

II From epilogue to prayer

Moving from metre to subject matter, the poem hardly corresponds to the normal concerns of a dramatic epilogue. As Michael Hattaway acutely observed,

What is distinctive about this poem is that it compliments the queen, but it does not invite her or the audience to think favorably of a play, in the manner of most epilogues. Most probably it was a prayer of the sort that was offered up at court or in private performances to the players (it does, after all, end with 'Amen'), perhaps to redeem themselves in the eyes of a society apt to regard them as little better than vagabonds. In 1596, the queen's godson Sir John Harington wrote cynically at the end of his *Metamorphosis of Ajax*: 'I will neither end with sermon nor prayer, lest some wags like me to my L[ord's] players who, when they have ended a bawdie comedy, as though that were a preparative to devotion, kneel down solemnly and pray all the companie to pray with them for their good Lord and Maister.'²³

Hattaway showed that it was customary at the end of a performance for an actor to pray for the Queen, the Privy Council, and whoever had arranged the event. Moreover, he cited more than a dozen play texts dating between 1533 and 1588 in which an epilogue is followed by a prayer for the sovereign. The Quarto text of *The Second part of Henrie the fourth* (1600), ends with an Epilogue, in the middle of which Shakespeare plays a joke on the audience. After an elaborate word play on a promised payment of a debt, to make up for 'a displeasing play' recently performed, the actor continues: 'and so I kneele downe before you; but indeed, to pray for the Queene.'²⁴ The Folio editors missed the joke and shifted this sentence to the end of the speech, where it would normally occur.

²² See 1:26, 133, 197.

²³ Hattaway, pp. 160-1, citing E. S. Donno (ed.) Sir John Harington, *A New Discourse of a Stale Subject Called 'The Metamorphosis of Ajax'* (New York, 1962), p. 185. Hattaway also cited a tradition observed by Sir William Holles of Houghton, Nottinghamshire: 'He alwais kept a company of stage players of his own which presented him masques and playes at festival times and upon dayes of solemnity ... alwaiss at the end of the play praying (as the custome then was) for the Queene's Majestie, the Council, and their right worshipping good Maister Sir William Holles' (161).

²⁴ See *The Second Part of King Henry the Fourth 1600*, ed. Thomas L. Berger (Oxford, 1990; Malone Society Reprints), sig. L1^v.

At this point we need to consider the generic features of a prayer, which can either be on behalf of oneself, in the admission of sin and an appeal for forgiveness, or for another person (or country, institution, or other body). In the second type it often becomes a form of well-wishing. The revised *Book of Common Prayer* (1559) contained the Litany ‘A prayer of the Queenes majesty’, which beseeched God

to beholde our mooste gracious soveraigne Lady Quene Elizabeth, and so replenyshe her with the grace of thy holy spirit, that she **may** always incline to thy wil, and walcke in thy way: Indue her plentifully wyth heavenly gifts: Graunt her in health and wealthe longe to live: strength her that she **may** vanquish and overcome al her enemies: And finally after this life, she **may** attaine everlasting joye and felicitie, thorowe Jesus Christ our Lorde. Amen.²⁵

To this day, the British National Anthem wishes ‘Long **may** she reign.’ I have used bold face to emphasise the key use of the optative mode, ‘**may**’.²⁶ As linguists define them, ‘optative clauses express hopes and wishes’.²⁷ In the Dial Hand poem this form recurs in three parallel clauses:

So most mightie Quene we pray
like the diall day by day
you **may** lead the seasons on
making new when old are gon.
that the babe which now is yong
and hathe yet no use of tongue
many a shrovetide here **may** bow
to that empresse I doe now
that the children of these lordes
sitting at your counsell bourdes
may be grave and aeged seene
of her that was ther father Quene
once I **wishe** this **wishe** again
heaven subscribe it with amen.

This speech might be defined as ‘well wishing’, combining as it does both the optative *may* and the expression of good wishes.

²⁵ See Brian Cummings (ed.), *The Book of Common Prayer. The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662* (Oxford, 2011), p. 121.

²⁶ See the *OED*: ‘the *optativus modus* is post-classical Latin (4th cent.), describing the mood or form of a verb of which a prominent function is the expression of wish or desire. Medieval English grammars define the optative mood as “that which yearns”. Arthur Golding, in his 1571 translation of Calvin’s *Psalmes of David ... with Commentaries*, equated ‘the optative moode’ with ‘a continual prayer’.

²⁷ See Rodney Huddleston and Geoffrey K. Pullum, *The Cambridge Grammar of the English Language* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 96. The form that such prayers take was related to the rhetorical figure known as *optatio*. As Henry Peacham defined it in the revised version of his rhetoric manual: ‘*Optatio* is a forme of speech ... by which the speaker expresseth his desire by wishing to God or Men ... The use hereof tendeth to signify our desires by our wishing, which we cannot accomplish by our power’. See Henry Peacham, *The Garden of Eloquence* (London, 1593), p. 72.

Returning to Dekker, the most significant example for the present discussion is *Old Fortunatus* (1599),²⁸ in which the ‘Epilogue at Court’ includes a prayer spoken by one of the two aged pilgrims to ‘the temple of Eliza’ (Richmond palace, where the actors are performing before the Queen):

[*Player*] Let euery one beg once more on his knee,
 One pardon for himself, and one for mee,
 For I intic’d you hither: O deere Goddesse,
 Breathe life in our nombd spirits with one smile,
 And from this cold earth, we with lively soules
 Shal rise like men (new-borne) & make heav’n sound
 With Hymnes sung to thy name, and praiers that we
May once a yeere so oft enjoy this sight,
 Til these yong boyes change their curld locks to white,
 And when gray-winged Age sits on their heads,
 That so their children **may** supply their Steads,
 And that heav’ns great Arithmetician,
 (Who in Scales of Nomber weyes the world)
May still to fortie two, add²⁹ one yeere more,
 And stil adde one to one, that went before,
 And multiply fowre tennes by many a ten:
 To this I crie Amen.

All. Amen, Amen.

[*Player*] Good night (deer mistris) those that wish thee harme,
 Thus let them stoope vnder destructions arme.

All. Amen, Amen.

(ed. Bowers, 1:197-8)

Hattaway failed to see the significance of the three uses of the optative, but he rightly commented that ‘Its conceits so closely resemble those in “As the Dial Hand Tells O’er” (the wish for a life so long for the queen that she might see the locks of boys turn white, followed by the mathematical imagery) that Dekker may be author of the dial poem’ (164). Helen Hackett agreed that the court epilogue to *Old Fortunatus* formed a striking match with the Dial Hand poem: both share ‘the conceits of Elizabeth’s reign extending into an infinite perpetuity, and of her subjects’ children becoming old in her service while she remains the same’.³⁰ An authority on Queen Elizabeth, Professor Hackett showed that this topos of ‘the Queen’s longevity and her national triumph over time’ was used by many authors.³¹ The modal verb ‘may’ is a generic marker, then, not for an author’s individual style but for the prayer as well-wishing.

²⁸ As E.K. Chambers recorded, the Admiral’s Men possessed an old play of *Fortunatus*, but the payments Dekker received in November 1599 were ‘on the scale of a new play’: an outright payment of £6 for the book, ‘together with an additional £1 “for the altringe of the booke” and £2 a fortnight later “for the eande of Fortewnatus for the courte”’. Chambers concluded that Dekker’s *Old Fortunatus* ‘was the court play of 27 December’, while *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* followed on 1 January, *The Elizabethan Stage*, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1923), 2:172, 3:291.

²⁹ Accepting Dilke’s emendation for ‘and’ (Q 1600): see Bowers 1:198.

³⁰ Hackett, op. cit., p. 38.

³¹ See *ibid.*, pp. 42-3, 51-3, and Helen Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (Basingstoke, 1995), and *Shakespeare and Elizabeth: The Meeting of Two Myths* (Princeton, 2009).

IV The Case for Dekker

Both Hattaway and Hackett reconstructed the social and theatrical context in which Dekker worked and which makes him a strong candidate for the authorship of this prayer-epilogue. Hackett also cited some specific verbal parallels between that poem and other works by Dekker, such as his frequent use of the word 'dial' in his prose pamphlets to describe intimations of mortality to which man and womankind are subject (48–9).³² Where Shakespeare never uses the word 'circular', she argued that Jonson uses it to express Platonic order and harmony, while Dekker connects it with time and mutability. Hackett noted that 'in *The Bellman of London* (1608) Dekker develops from the term "circular" an extended meditation on man as microcosm, and on cycles of growth and decay':

The world is circular. So is man, for let him stand upright and extend forth his armes to the length, A line drawn from his navell to all the utmost limits of his body, makes his body Orbiculer. And as man hath foures ages, Infancie, Child-hood, Youth and olde age: so hath the world, in which foure measures of time are filled out, the Risinges and fallings, the growings up and the witherings both of the one and the other. (49)

That juxtaposition of beginnings and endings within the same line is a mark of Dekker's treatment of time, as we shall see. Hackett also cited Dekker's pamphlet *The Wonderful Year*, 'an immediate and evocative account' not just of the plague year but of the death of Elizabeth which preceded it, shows him 'thinking about the Queen's passing in terms of temporal cycles':

She came in with the fall of the leafe, and went away in the Spring: her life, which was dedicated to Virginitie, both beginning & closing up a miraculous Mayden circle: for she was born upon a Lady Eve, and died upon a Lady Eve.³³

This 'sense of providential pattern of endings which return to beginnings' is the organising thread of the Dial Hand poem.

Dekker's loyalty to Elizabeth continued after her death, reaching belated flowering in his anti-papal play, *The Whore of Babylon* (1607), a 'Drammaticall Poem', as Dekker explained in his preface, intended 'to set forth ... the Greatnes, Magnanimity, Constancy, Clemency, and other the incomparable Heroical vertues of our late Queene. And (on the contrary part) the inveterate malice ... of that Purple whore of Rome' (Bowers 2:497).

³² In her essay Hackett recorded that 'the only other occurrence of the phrase "dial hand" in the printed literature of the period' is the reference to 'beauty, like a dial hand' in Shakespeare's Sonnet 104. Hackett had searched for "dial hand" and "dial's hand" in Early English Books Online (EEBO), the Oxford English Dictionary, Literature Online (LION), and Google Books' (39, 29n), without success. However, I can now add a third instance in Dekker's play *The Wonder of a Kingdom* (1631):

For Marriners
Are clocks of danger that do ne're stand still,
Their **dialls-hand** ere points to'th stroke of death,
And (albeit seldome windlesse) loose their breath; (Bowers 3:619)

³³ *The Wonderfull Yeare. 1603* (London, 1603), sig. B4^r. 'Lady Eve' is the evening or day before the feast of the Annunciation, 25 March.

The chief character is ‘Titania, the Faerie Queene: under whom is figured our late Queene Elizabeth’, and who is attended by four ‘Councillors’ (2:496). The play includes a scene where three foreign princes come to woo Titania, in which Dekker compresses events from the early years of Elizabeth’s reign (1558 to 1581). In reply Titania declares that in such momentous matters princes should take advice from their counsellors, a position endorsed by a counsellor, who warns her of the disastrous effects should she not do so. It would mean the Queen’s death, a foreign war, and general mobilisation:

would you see your **Lords**
 (In stead of **sitting at your Councill boards**)
 Locking their **grave**, white, reverend heads in steele? (Bowers 2:514)

As Hackett pointed out, this is ‘a distinct verbal echo of the Dial Hand poem’, with its wish

that the children of these **lords**
sitting at your counsell bourdes
 may be **grave** and aeged seene
 of her that was ther father Quene

Hackett noted that ‘the play also addresses Titania as “Bright Empresse, Queene of maides” just as the Dial Hand poem also hails Elizabeth as an “empresse”. These are strong indicators that these two works are by the same author’ (51).

We can strengthen Hackett’s recognition of this title as an authorial marker by quoting a scene in Dekker’s *Old Fortunatus*, performed at court on 27 December 1599. The ‘Prologue at Court’ presents two old men, travelling ‘to the temple of Eliza’, who realise that the bright light before them is not the moon’s radiance:

Peace foole: tremble, and kneele: The Moone saist thou?
 Our eyes are dazled by Elizaes beames, [Both kneele.]
 See (if at least thou dare see) where shee sits: (1:113)

The second pilgrim then celebrates Elizabeth’s triumph over time, in a passage quoted above in Hackett’s essay. But it has not been noted that this same gesture of kneeling in deference to the Queen occurs in the play’s final scene, added by Dekker for this court performance.³⁴ The three allegorical figures, Fortune, Vice and Virtue, have been disputing pre-eminence (5.2.254–301), until Fortune proposes that the ‘court | of mortall Judges’ should decide ‘Which of us three shall most be deified’ (302–4). Vice agrees, but Virtue chooses a higher authority, addressing the Queen: ‘My Judge shall be your sacred deitie.’ At this, ‘the horrid monster’ Vice runs off, and Virtue requests a new verdict:

Fortune, who conquers now?
Fortune. Vertue, I see,
 Thou wilt triumph both over her and me.
All. **Empresse** of heaven and earth.
Fortune. Why doe you mocke me?
 Kneele not to me, to her transfer your eyes,
 There sits the Queene of Chance, I bend my knees,

³⁴ Scholars agree that the new material begins at 5.2.261.

Lower then yours: dread goddesse, 'tis most meete,
 [*To the Queen, kneeling.*]
 That Fortune fall downe at thy conqu'ring feete.
 Thou sacred **Empresse** that commandst the Fates,
 Forgive what I have to thy handmaid don,
 And at thy Chariot wheelles Fortune shall run. (1:195–6)

One area of Dekker's work not yet explored in this connection is that of the civic entertainment. Dekker wrote four of these, beginning with *The Magnificent Entertainment* (1604) for King James's progress through London, delayed due to the plague,³⁵ and three Lord Mayor's shows, in 1612, 1628, and 1629.³⁶ In all four Dekker uses many of the same linguistic formulae that occur in the Dial Hand Epilogue, such as the well-wishing optative 'may' and the juxtaposition within the same sentence of antithetical measures of time, such as 'beginning' and 'ending'. One detail in the Epilogue that may puzzle modern readers is the wish that the Queen's counsellors 'may be **grave and aeged** seene', an association repeated in the parallel reference in *The Whore of Babylon* for the shocking prospect of these men having to lock 'their **grave**, white, reverend heads in steele.' Dekker used the epithet 'grave' for public officials again in *The Magnificent Entertainment*, where he introduced London's '*Genius Loci*' to celebrate all the years of peace that the city had enjoyed under the rule of Elizabeth, as measured by the cycle of the seasons:

Genius. here have I,
 Slept (by the favour of a Deity)
 Fortie-foure Summers and as many springs
 Not freighted with the threats of forraine Kings.
 But held up in that gowned State I have,
 By twice-Twelve Fathers **politique and grave**.³⁷ (2:256)

These were the aldermen who were responsible for each ward. At the end of his narrative Dekker records that 'the Citie elected sixteene Comitties' to plan the entertainment, 'of which number, foure were Aldermen, the others **grave** Commoners' (2:302). In *Troia-Nova Triumphans*, based on the myth of London having been founded after the fall of Troy by Brutus, who named it 'Troynovant', Dekker introduces Arete (Virtue) who assures this year's Mayor that he can rely upon the support of London's civic organisation, the guilds:

³⁵ *The Magnificent Entertainment: Given to King James, Queene Anne his wife, and Henry Frederick the Prince, upon the day of his Majesties Triumphant Passage ... through his Honourable Citie of London ... 1603* (Bowers 2:253–303). See David M. Bergeron, 'Harrison, Jonson and Dekker: the magnificent entertainment for King James (1604)', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 31 (1969): 445–8; Bergeron, *English Civic Pageantry, 1558–1642* (Columbia, SC, 1971), pp. 71–89; and Anne Lancashire, 'Dekker's accession pageant for James I', *Early Theatre*, 12 (2009): 39–50.

³⁶ *Troia-Nova Triumphans* (Bowers 3: 25–47); *Britannia's Honor* (Bowers 4:77–112); and *London's Tempe* (Bowers 4:97–113).

³⁷ In all three instances quoted here Dekker uses 'and' to join the word 'grave' to another epithet: '**grave and aeged**', '**politique and grave**', '**Grave and well-ordred**'. He does so again in one of the scenes (5,2) he contributed to *1 Honest Whore*: 'He shew you here a man that was sometimes, | A very **grau**e and **wealthy** Cittizen' (Bowers: 2.98). In one of the entertainments he uses three epithets, praising London's '**Braue, Graue, Noble** Citizens' (4; 90). The nouns qualified by these epithets denote responsible members of society.

And (to maintaine
 This Greatnesse) ... Twelve Societies stand,
(Grave and well-ordred) bearing chiefe Command
 Within this City ...
 All arm'd, to knit their Nerves (in One) with Thine,
 To guard this new Troy: ... that She **may** shine
 In Thee, as Thou in Her (3:236)

The day's festivities end with a farewell speech of Justice, a leave-taking that includes the Aldermen appointed for each ward:

A good Night
 To Thee, and these **Grave** Senators, to whom
 My last Fare-wels, in these glad **wishes** come,
 That thou & they (whose strength the City beares)
May be as **old** in Goodnesse as in Yeares. (3:246)

Many of these associative phrases occur in Dekker's next Lord Mayor's entertainment, *Britannia's Honor* (1628). In the second presentation 'London' ends her speech of welcome in these familiar terms:

May your yeares last day, **end** as this **beginnes**,
 Sphær'd in the loves of Noble Citizens. (4:88)

In the third presentation 'Fame' finds a traditional circular metaphor for the Mayor's term of office, linking the day and the year:

Your this dayes Progressse (rising like the Sunne),
 Which through the yearely Zodiacke on must runne. (4:89)

Fame ends her speech with words echoing the Dial Hand poem, not only the **wish** and **may** forms, but also the mark of seriousness befitting the Mayor – '**Grave** Prætor', using the Roman equivalent of Mayor – and even the rhyme of **Board** and **Lord**:

I **wish** (**Grave** Prætor) that as Hand in Hand,
 Plenty and Bounty bring you safe to Land,
 So, Health **may** be chiefe Carver at that **Board**
 To which you hasten. Bee as Good a **Lord**
 I'th'eyes of Heaven, as this day you are Great
 In Fames applause (4:90)

Commentators describe this pageant as 'uninspired',³⁸ no doubt justly, but even the commonplace phrase 'Hand in Hand', here rhyming with 'Land', matches a similar piece of padding in the Dial Hand poem, where 'day by day' rhymes with 'pray'.

This brief account of Dekker's civic entertainments has shown that they share many features with his plays, features that also appear in the Dial Hand poem. As concluding evidence, consider this Song from *Troia-Nova Triumphans* (1612), celebrating

³⁸ Cf. Bergeron pp. 170–8.

Sir John Swinerton's inauguration as Lord Mayor, in which Dekker returned to trochaics, without the fluctuation with iambs to which he tended earlier in his career:

Honor, eldest Child of Fame,
 Thou farre older then thy Name,
 Waken with my song, and see
 One of thine, here waiting thee.
 Sleepe not now
 But thy brow
 Chac't with Oliues, Oke and Baies
 And an age of happy dayes
 Vpward bring
 Whilst we sing
 In a Chorus altogether,
 Welcome, welcome, welcome hither. (3:243)

Given a formal occasion, Dekker shows that he can deploy the formal structure of trochaics just as effectively as other poets, in both four- and two-stress lines. As in the prayer for the Queen concluding *Old Fortunatus*, quoted above, Dekker makes the apotropaic gesture to turn away evil influence:

Enuy angry with the dead,
 Far from this place hide thy head:
 And Opinion, that nere knew
 What was either good or true
 Fly, I say (3:244)

The final stanza uses the optative mood for well-wishing, so frequent in these Entertainments:³⁹

Goe on nobly, **may** thy Name,
 Be as old, and good as Fame.
 Euer be remembred here (Ibid.)

On the evidence presented here I attribute the Dial Hand Epilogue to Dekker.

V The Case for Shakespeare

To assign this poem to Dekker may well be correct, but it will do little for the reputation of either the scholar or the poet. To assign it to Shakespeare, however, makes it eligible for inclusion in his collected works, where it might be read by undergraduates and members of the public. The scholar who succeeds in getting a Shakespeare attribution published is guaranteed considerable media attention, yet such triumphs can be short-lived. Donald Foster gained notoriety by claiming that the *Funerall Elegye* (1612) indubitably belonged in Shakespeare's canon, and even persuaded editors of three major American college editions to include it as his. When it was proved to be by John Ford it was promptly removed, and Foster's scholarly reputation never recovered.⁴⁰ Considering

³⁹ See also Bowers 3: 229, 236, 240; 4: 88, 112.

⁴⁰ See Brian Vickers, *'Counterfeiting' Shakespeare. Evidence, Authorship, and John Ford's Funerall Elegie* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 55-508.

how intensively researchers have looked for evidence of writings hitherto unknown or unattributed to Shakespeare it seems unlikely that discoveries will be made. John Nance's attribution of the Dial hand poem to Shakespeare persuaded the editors of the *New Oxford Shakespeare* to admit it to their canon,⁴¹ so his claims are ripe for evaluation.

Nance begins his essay by reviewing previous research.⁴² He gives two paragraphs to Helen Hackett's essay, providing a perfunctory summary of her case for Dekker but disputing her rejection of the 'four most widely accepted Shakespeare references to Elizabeth' as relevant to the authorship of this poem.⁴³ Nance claims that 'all of them evoke the queen in passages also referring to the passage of time. The central conceit of the contested verses compares Elizabeth to the perpetual movement of a "dial hand"' (207). That misleading summary misses the whole point of these verses, that other beings may be subject to time and change but not the Virgin Queen. Having dismissed Hackett's 'generalized assertions about Shakespeare and Dekker', Nance claims that she identified 'a single verbal parallel' in the Dial Hand poem that 'also appears in Dekker's *Whore of Babylon* ("sitting at your council boards")'. This partial quotation is another misleading report, for it leaves out the rhyme word: "Would you see your *Lords* | (In stead of *sitting at your Councill boards*)", a relevant stylistic detail, as we have seen, and one that Dekker used again in the 1628 Lord Mayor show. Moreover, since Nance has not yet quoted the Dial Hand poem—he does not do so until p. 222, 15 pages later—readers of his essay will not realise that this is an unusually extensive parallel involving five consecutive words, with two further words extending the collocation ('*Lords*', and '*grave*'). Such lengthy matches are rare, and therefore more significant authorial markers. As we have seen, Hackett cited another relevant detail from *The Whore of Babylon*, that one of Titania's counsellors addresses her as 'Bright Empresse, Queen of Maides' (1.2.68), and argued that both matches 'are strong indicators that these two works are by the same author'. Nance rejected Hackett's point in these terms:

Hackett does not specify that these two 'echoes' appear more than one hundred lines apart: Dekker's use of the word 'empress' (also used eighty-five times elsewhere in English drama from 1576 to 1642) occurs near the beginning of the scene (1.2.68), whereas 'sitting at your council boards' appears toward the end (l. 176)

This summary is inaccurate in two respects. The statistic of other occurrences of 'empress' would only be relevant if Nance could show that a substantial proportion of those 85 referred to Queen Elizabeth; and far from this speech occurring 'toward the end' of the scene', there are over one hundred lines to go (it ends at line 286). In any case, the criticism is irrelevant. Hackett did not cite the two passages as part of a collocation, say, but merely as two expressions of the special loyalty of a trusted counsellor to a sovereign. One of the attributes we look for in good scholarship is the accuracy with which the work of other scholars is cited.

⁴¹ See note 9 above. In the *Authorship Companion* Gary Taylor and Rory Loughnane dismiss the Dekker attributions by Hattaway and Hackett as 'based on weak and circumstantial evidence', while endorsing Nance's attribution (p. 525).

⁴² Nance, *op. cit.*, pp.204-8. Future page references will be included in the text following the quotation.

⁴³ The four supposed references to the Queen, commonplaces in Shakespeare criticism since the 18th century, are two passages in the Sonnets (nos. 106: 'When in the chronicle of wasted time', and 107: 'The mortal moon hath her eclipse endured') which are indeterminate; a reference to the 'vestal thrones by the west' (*MND*, 2.1.55-81); and the Chorus in *Henry V* (5.0.30-1) which mentions 'our gracious Empress'. Even if we accept these two, they are far removed from Dekker's extensive and enthusiastic praises of his sovereign.

Having disposed of Dekker, and before making his case for Shakespeare's authorship, Nance now provides an extensive discussion of 'Methodology' (208–13), followed by an even longer section on 'Control Tests' (213–22), devoting more than half of his essay to setting out what he believes to be 'a reliable methodology currently accepted by modern attribution studies'. This consisted of searching the electronic corpus of EEBO (Early English Books Online) and the purely literary corpus in LION (Literature Online), for matches with the Dial Hand poem. Nance investigated 'every word sequence' involving two, three, or four words (bigram, trigram, tetragram),⁴⁴ and every 'substantive collocation (proximity searches for content words)'. Nance demonstrated his methodology by taking a single line from the epilogue to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: 'We will make amends ere long' (5.1.434), and then searching the whole poem, 'word by word', for matches in his database (210–16). Subsequently he applied the same method to a lyric by Dekker (216–18), and one by Jonson (218–20), limiting his search to the first 94 words, that being the extent of the Shakespeare epilogue. For each search, Nance then counted the number of matches with individual authors (where known), and those with the highest score emerge as the most likely author. Having 'clearly identified the correct author' in his control tests on these three lyrics (220), Nance finally applied his method to the Dial Hand poem and pronounced Shakespeare 'the most likely author' (222–3). This 'micro-attribution' method, using very small samples, may seem a rational procedure, but several critiques have shown its limitations.⁴⁵ The samples are much too small; other tests have shown that it mis-attributed samples of known authorship; and it performed less well than anti-plagiarism software.

The evidence on which Nance awarded the prize to Shakespeare consists of six verbal parallels, starting with three that supposedly match the poem's opening lines:

As the diall hand tells ore
the same howers it had before
still beginning in the ending

'Tis no lesse I **tell** you: for the bawdy **hand** of the **Dyall** is now upon the
pricke of Noone *Romeo and Juliet*, 2.4.113–14⁴⁶

If life did ride upon a **Dials** point,
Still ending at the arrival of an houre *1 Henry IV*, 5.2.82–3
Whereto my finger, like a **Dialls** point,
Is pointing still, in cleansing them from tears.
Now sir, the sound that **tels** what **houre** it is *Richard II*, 5.5.53–4

The first of the claimed 'six unique parallels', Mercutio's bawdy joke to the Nurse, is clearly inappropriate to the subject matter of the Dial Hand poem. Nance defined collocations as shared 'content words', and he himself used the criterion of appropriate reference or meaning when reporting parallels for Puck's line 'If **we shadowes** have offended' (*MND*, 5.1.423). He accepted as a valid parallel Falstaff's phrase: 'for **we** have a

⁴⁴ Nance prefers the idiosyncratic form 'quadgram' for the latter.

⁴⁵ See Darren Freebury-Jones and Marcus Dahl, 'The limitations of micro-attribution', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 60 (2018): 467–95; Pervez Rizvi, 'The problem of microattribution', *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities*, 2018 <https://doi.org/10.1093/digitalsh/fqy066> [last consulted on 23 December 2018]; and Brian Vickers, 'Is EEBO (LION) suitable for attribution studies?' (forthcoming).

⁴⁶ All references are to G. Blakemore Evans and J.J.M. Tobin (eds.), *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd edition (Boston, 1997).

number of **shadoes** fill up the muster booke' (2 *Henry IV*, 3.2.134–5), but rejected parallels in Lyly and Rowley because 'Shakespeare's match is the only one where "shadows" means "spirits" or "insubstantial things"' (215, n. 35). In Mercutio's mouth the content word 'hand' is completely transformed by the epithet 'bawdy', transferring attention from the clock to a human hand, a shift to the body confirmed by the related pun upon 'pricke' (reminiscent of the moralising engraving by Hans Sebald Behan, 'Death and the Lascivious Couple').⁴⁷ Similarly, the word 'tell' in this context has the basic sense of 'inform', not the derived sense of defining the time of day or night. Nothing in this claimed match has affinity with the Dial Hand poem.

As for Hotspur's defiant speech on the eve of the fatal battle of Shrewsbury, Nance has not given the preceding lines:

O Gentlemen, the time of life is short;
To spend that shortnesse basely were too long,
If life did ride upon a Dials point,
Still ending at the arrivall of an houre.⁴⁸

The Riverside edition glosses the final line as meaning 'lasting only for an houre';⁴⁹ it implies a quite different sense to the 'diall hand' that 'tells ore | the same howers it had before'. Hotspur refers to the brevity of life, not to cyclic return. As for Richard's dungeon soliloquy, the preceding lines also establish contextual meaning:

I wasted Time, and now doth Time waste me:
For now hath Time made me his numbring clocke;
My Thoughts, are minutes; and with Sighes they jarre
Their watches on unto mine eyes, the outward Watch,
Whereto my finger, like a Dialls point,
Is pointing still, in cleansing them from teares.
Now sir, the sound that tels what houre it is,
Are clamorous groanes, that strike upon my heart,
Which is the bell: so Sighes, and Teares, and Grones,
Shew Minutes, Hours, and Times.

Unlike the clock face in the Dial Hand poem, Shakespeare bases this conceit upon a more elaborate time-piece, one that also measures minutes. The 'outward watch', or clock-face, is represented by Richard's eyes, while its hand is the 'dials point' or finger with which he wipes away his tears.⁵⁰ This passage may share some 'content words' with the Dial Hand poem, but they are used to a quite different, idiosyncratic purpose.

⁴⁷ See Brian Vickers, 'Language made new: *Romeo and Juliet*', in Angelo Righetti (ed.), *Rileggere/Re-Reading 'Romeo and Juliet'* (Verona, 1969), pp. 19-44. The engraving is reproduced in Plate 3 (p. 40).

⁴⁸ Riverside punctuation. Folio has a full stop after 'long', and a comma after 'houre'.

⁴⁹ In his edition David Bevington gave this summary: 'a life basely spent would be too long even if human life lasted only the single hourly movement of the hand of the dial ... always ending at the termination of that hour': *Henry IV, Part 1* (Oxford, 1987), p. 271.

⁵⁰ See the careful elucidation of this complex comparison by Charles Forker in his Arden 3 edition of *Richard II* (London, 2002), pp. 46–7.

Nance claims three further matches between the poem and Shakespeare. For ‘still **beginning in the ending**’, he cites the Prologue to *Troilus and Cressida*:

To tell you (faire Beholders) that our Play
Leapes ore the vaunt and firstlings of those broyles
Beginning in the middle, starting thence away,
To what may be digested in a Play

Nance writes that ‘this parallel is from the Epilogue to *Troilus and Cressida* (223, n. 59), when it is of course the Prologue. But he fails to note that the phrase ‘**Beginning in the middle**’ derives from the *Epistula ad Pisones, or Ars Poetica*, where Horace describes the true epic poet – Homer – as one who avoids starting from the origins of a dispute: ‘Ever he hastens to the issue, and hurries his readers into the story’s midst’ [*in medias res*].⁵¹ The ‘content words’ may be the same, but again the total meaning is completely different in sense from the steady ‘circular account’ of the Dial Hand poem, the cyclic repetition of the hand’s progress around the dial.

Second, for ‘**that** the babe which now is **yong | and hath** yet no use of tongue’, Nance cites a passage from Iago’s malicious speech disparaging Othello as a foolish (or lecherous) and immature young man:

the knave is handsome, **young: and hath** all those requisites in
him **that** folly and green minds looke after (Othello, 2.1.245–6)

This passage shares a trigram and an additional word with the Dial Hand poem, but the context relates to a completely alien world. Finally, for ‘you may lead the seasons on | **making new** when **old** are gon’, Nance cites a line from Sonnet 2:

This were to be **new made when** thou art **old**

This is the closest, or least improbable of Nance’s suggested matches.

Despite the diligence that Nance displayed in searching two databases covering all the drama, poetry and prose published between 1579 and 1642, the results were disappointing. His claim to have found ‘Shakespeare’s six unique parallels’ proves, on closer examination, to be groundless. When the phrasal matches identified by the search engines of EEBO and LION are restored to their context in Shakespeare’s plays they turn out to have completely different meanings or referents. The innocent ‘babe’ of the Dial Hand poem, ‘which now is yong | And hath yet no use of tongue’—the root meaning of ‘infant’— is almost at the opposite pole of human experience from Iago’s malicious description of Othello, intended to drive Roderigo to desperation. The clock-face that Richard II envisages in his elaborate analogy is unlike that in the epilogue both in technology—it has a minute hand—and in emotional effect, lachrymose self-pity compared to a celebration of a beloved monarch’s longevity. The phrase ‘beginning in the middle’ in *Troilus* expresses a literary-critical concept of how best to organise a narrative and has nothing in common with the cyclic imagery of the Dial Hand poem, celebrating Queen Elizabeth’s unique self-renewal, ‘still beginning in the ending’. Nance’s attribution can be dismissed: ‘all of the evidence points’ not to Shakespeare, but to Thomas Dekker.

⁵¹ *Ars Poetica*. 148–9; tr. H.R. Fairclough, *Horace. Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetica* (London and Cambridge, MA, 1970), p. 463.